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Another Smear Of CIA

By C. L. SULZBERGER
The New York Times

PARIS — It is a cold war cliché to blame the CIA when things go wrong. Because their very nature condemns them to obscurity and anonymity, intelligence services attract rumors and are incapable of effectively denying them. Thus CIA "spooks" are often imagined lurking behind disasters ranging from earthquakes to unsuccessful coups d'état.

Soviet propaganda makes the most of this situation. Whenever a particularly ugly mess occurs in almost any corner of the world, Moscow spreads word that it is the CIA's fault. Since few people would believe a CIA denial, our most secret organization becomes a useful target for those who wish to smear the United States.

In 1961, when a group of French generals in Algeria led an uprising against President de Gaulle, word was soon spread that the CIA was behind the insurrection. Even the reputable Paris newspaper *Le Monde* wrote: "It appears well established that American agents more or less encouraged Maurice Challe (who headed the rebellion)." *Le Monde* also wrote: "There was no truth in this, but insidious rumors are difficult to quash. As a matter of fact, that particular report — like many others — was originated and disseminated by the Russians. It was first printed in the official Soviet newspaper *Izvestia*, then embellished and spread by the Polish press attache in Paris, and eventually was published in respectable journals here. Some Frenchmen still believe the CIA sponsored the abortive 1961 putsch. Now again the French gossip mart is delightedly spreading the tale that the CIA is involved in France's current number one scandal, the Ben Barka affair. Mehdi Ben Barka, a left wing Moroccan politician, was kidnapped here last October and almost surely murdered. Investigation has shown that agents of SDECE, France's equivalent of the CIA, were active in the crime."

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...
CIA — The Ben Barka affair has embarrassed De Gaulle and poisoned French relations with Morocco. It has also advertised unsavory aspects of SDECE, an organization known in the argot as the "swimming pool."

This should have been scandal enough for the scandal-loving French public, but it wasn't; somebody had to bring in the poor old CIA.

The CIA has on occasion been involved in other messes, but it had nothing to do with this affair. The American government could not possibly hope to gain by Ben Barka's disappearance.